2/22/96

Riverside and the Region

National Date Festival

Coachella Valley, CA

2/16 - 2/25

FYI

Festival ain't the pits

INDIO

I hope they don't do too much tinkering with the National Date Festival. Because if they do, sooner or later, somebody's going to notice the bugle. Then somebody's going to say maybe we should get rid of it, and that will be the beginning of the end of the National Date Festival.

DAN BERNSTEIN

There's kind of a western-county pointy headedness about the Date Festival. We've got our orange blossoms out here. We've got our balloons. We've got our wine. Why should we schlep all the way to Indio for a date festival? (Answer: That's where the dates are.) Ordinarily, this kind of snobbery could be brushed aside as easily as an ostrich sheds a jockey in one of those fiercely contested National Date Festival races. But this isn't ordinarily. In addition to being a National Date Festival, this happens to be the Riverside County Fair. In February? Perhaps you'd like to visit Indio in August.

Because this is the county fair, there is a theory that it should appeal to the whole county. There is some belief that more people might show up and the official sponsor — the county — might not lose money. Which is what might have led the festival's chief pitchman to assert: "We want to know who has the best apple pie in the county, the best hog in the county ..."

No harm in this — to a point. Though our reputation continues to flourish, I don't think we need to know who cooks up the best methamphetamine in the county.

No, I don't see any harm in the big-tent approach to the National Date Festival, but I must sound the bold, new, conservative note of caution: Let us not throw out the date with the bath water. (Let us not even get the date wet.) The National Date Festival has much to commend it. It has:

. Educational value. Most western-county folks believe that "blind," "double" and "hot" are the three most common dates. A visit to the Date Festival forced me to reconsider. I counted more than a dozen types of dates, from Abada to Zahidi. Did you know that 95 percent of the dates produced in the U.S. are grown in Riverside County? (The remaining 5 percent are generated by Heidi Fleiss.)

Do you have any idea what they grow in the Coachella Valley? The Thermal Chamber O' Commerce exhibit overflows with lettuce, cabbage, cilantro, celery, radishes, onions, spinach and leeks.

. Dramatic value. Speaking of leaks, I received a most juicy Date Post-it: The Philip Morris Co., which supposedly paid $15,000 to be the official tobacco purveyor of the National Date Festival, didn't take kindly to a county Health Department booth featuring a "Get Rid Of Your Tobacco Gear" banner and "Joe Cancer" T-shirts — a sickly camel with a slash through it. Tipster said Philip Morris prevailed upon fair officials to exhile the Health Department booth off the main drag and into obscure climes.

Sub-plot: Tipster finds it curious that the county embraces tobacco sales on county property even as it spends beaucoup tax bucks treating indigent Riverside General patients for lung diseases. Anti-smokers plan a fairgrounds protest Friday.

. Family value. The "Get of Sire" competition featured groups of pot-bellied pigs that had the same father but not the same mother. We are usually so quick to judge each other's lifestyles, but the "Get of Sire" audience was refreshingly accepting. Idea for next year: Invite President

▶ A proposal by the Sheriff's Department would gather several agencies at March Air Force Base.

By David Olgu
The Press-Enterprise

RIVE...

March Air Force Base would become the ke... enforcement center in Riverside County under a Sh... Department proposal to move the coroner's office, ... crime lab and a county forensics center there.

State and local agencies are reviewing the pr... before it goes to the federal government.

An earlier propo... to open a 600-acre enforcement training center at the base ... support of the civilia... March Joint Powers ...

March Air Force Base will become a ... and National Guard ... in April. About ... 0,000 acres will be available for civilian ... Joint Powers Commission is making ... civilian use to the Air Force, which is ... decisions by late spring.

Under the latest Sheriff's Department ... Riverside sheriff's station on Spruce Street ... and all operations, including the departm... investigations center would move to the ... building at the northern edge of March.

Other offices that would go to the ...

Mired down with work

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The rain wasn't nice to Alessandro Boulevard in Moreno Valley. John Russo supervises cle...ing of mud and debris there Wednesday. R... nance crew leader. Weather, ...

Area water at risk, Sen. Boxer warns

By Dion Nissenbaum
The Press-Enterprise

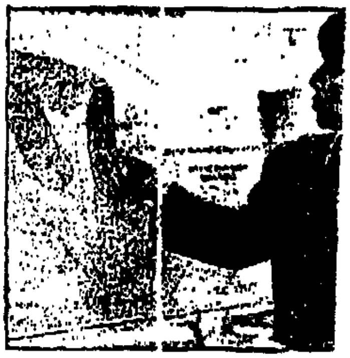
SAN BERNARDINO

U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer criticized Republican ... cuts and warned Wednesday that unresolved ... negotiations are threatening the drinking water ... residents in the Inland area, including River... ...ogram budget ...000,000

Standing outside a water treatment plant ... in San Bernardino, Boxer said a combination of feder... ...duction and a reduction in environmental funding could ...pardize local efforts to protect clean water.

Because federal lawmakers and President Cl... yet to agree on a budget, many government ... have been left in limbo, including plans to const... plant to treat contaminated water from the ... ...n have ...ograms ...f a new ...ewmark

Please see ...TR, B-5



Carlos Puma / The ...

Sen. Barbara Boxer discusses water ... tion from the Newmark Superfund ...

Parents seek to keep kids out of co...

By Phil Pitchford
The Press-Enterprise

The ... program relies on the willing... people who slashed th...